

**AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS**

**This listing of claims will replace all prior versions and listings of claims in the application:**

**LISTING OF CLAIMS:**

1. (Currently Amended) A communication method using a first access (3)providing a plurality of information channels including ~~at least one~~ information channel (4) for transmitting voice and first data and having at least one signaling channel (5) for transmitting signaling signals and second data relating to at least one of ~~the~~said access and said first data ~~to be transmitted and said access~~, said method further comprising the step of providing at least one additional signaling channel in a signaling path of a second access which also provides a plurality of information channels, said additional signaling channel being on a different physical medium from said first signaling channel and for use in conjunction with said one information channel, determining an order of priority of the use of the signaling channels, and assigning the highest priority functional signaling channel to the access.

2. (Previously Presented) A method according to claim 1, characterized in that the information channel for transmitting voice and first data is on a different physical medium from at least one of the signaling channels (5,9,10).

3. (Previously Presented) A method according to claim 1, characterized in that the operational status of the highest priority signaling channel is regularly tested (17) when said highest priority signaling channel is not in service.

4. (Currently Amended) ~~A method~~—A communication method using ~~an~~ a first access (3) including at least one information channel (4) for transmitting voice and first data and one signaling channel for transmitting signaling signals and second data relating to at least one of ~~the~~ said access and said first data ~~to be transmitted and said access~~, said method further comprising the step of providing at least one additional signaling channel for use in conjunction with said one information channel, determining an order of priority of the use of the signaling channels, and assigning the highest priority functional signaling channel to the access, said method further comprising the step of neutralizing at least one, but less than all, of said information channels if the signaling channel in service is not sufficiently functional.

5. (Currently Amended) A method according to claim 1, characterized in that ~~an~~ each said access provides thirty information channels.

6. (Canceled)

7. (Currently Amended) A method of communication in which: at least two accesses are used between two exchanges (1,2) each access having ~~at least one~~ a plurality of information channels (4) for transmitting voice and data, said method further comprising: providing a common signaling channel for transmitting signaling signals relating to at least one of (i) data to be transmitted and (ii) said accesses, sharing on said common signaling channel signaling signals relating to at least said two accesses, and managing the two accesses using the signaling signals delivered by said common signaling channel.

Amendment Under 37 C.F.R. § 1.114(c)  
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8. (New) A method according to claim 1, characterized in that each said access provides thirty information channels.